Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Reorienting risk to resilience: street-involved youth perspectives on preventing the transition to injection drug use

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 19 March 2015

**Reviewer:** Karen Osilla

**Reviewer's report:**

This paper describes qualitative results from ten focus groups with street-involved youth aged 16-24. The purpose of the study was to identify protective factors that prevent youth from transitioning into injection drug use. Overall, the topic of the paper is significant because this is a high-risk group and their focus on street-involved youth is very novel. They define the research questions well, but there are several concerns that are important to note.

**Abstract:** The abstract could be streamlined. Several words are unclear without proper definitions (e.g., youth collaborators; street-involved youth; regular post focus group debriefings). The methods would benefit from a sentence indicating how youth were recruited and where focus groups took place. This population is very novel and hard-to-reach so readers will be very interested in learning how the authors successfully did this. If this was an evaluation of focus groups, why were there field notes? It is unclear why having to reframe the protocol would be an important result. This seems to be a methods distinction and not a result. In fact, it may not need to be discussed at all. Reframing discussion questions is a natural skill that most focus group facilitators would do in the moment.

**Background:** Good review of the relevant literature related to this study. Describing studies among “youth” is slightly confusing because the authors recruited a young adult population as well. The authors may clarify what age range the studies covered.

**Methods:** How were youth collaborators found? It would be helpful in the paragraph that starts on line 82 to specifically describe the duties of these collaborators. The consent process for study participants was not described. Was consent obtained by partner organizations prior to study staff recruitment processes? Was verbal consent obtained at the start of the focus groups?

Inclusion and exclusion criteria need to be elaborated on – were these all current users? In general, a more detailed description of the sample would be helpful. Participants were between 16-24 (as noted from the abstract and not included in the Methods). This age range is wide and may be problematic – have younger participants been exposed to IDU, have they recently initiated drug use, how long have they been on the streets – one might argue that the sample has not yet progressed to IDU vs. actively decided against IDU. The latter population seems to be assumed by the authors so more elaboration would be important. As the
authors describe the sample in more detail, they should note any biases in selection in the Limitations section (e.g., the sample included mostly 16 year olds who reported being on the streets for a month).

Good description of focus group analyses.

Results: This section is very long, but the quotes are very informative. The authors may consider putting quotes in a table with each of the themes they identified.

Discussion: The first paragraph could benefit from some “take home” points of how these data could be used by service providers. In line 439, the authors note that “others have argued” that understanding these perspectives have been important, but this argument needs to be clearly stated. As currently structured, the reader has to dig through each section of the discussion to glean the applicability of these findings. For example, a paragraph on “Implications” could be important.

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests' below